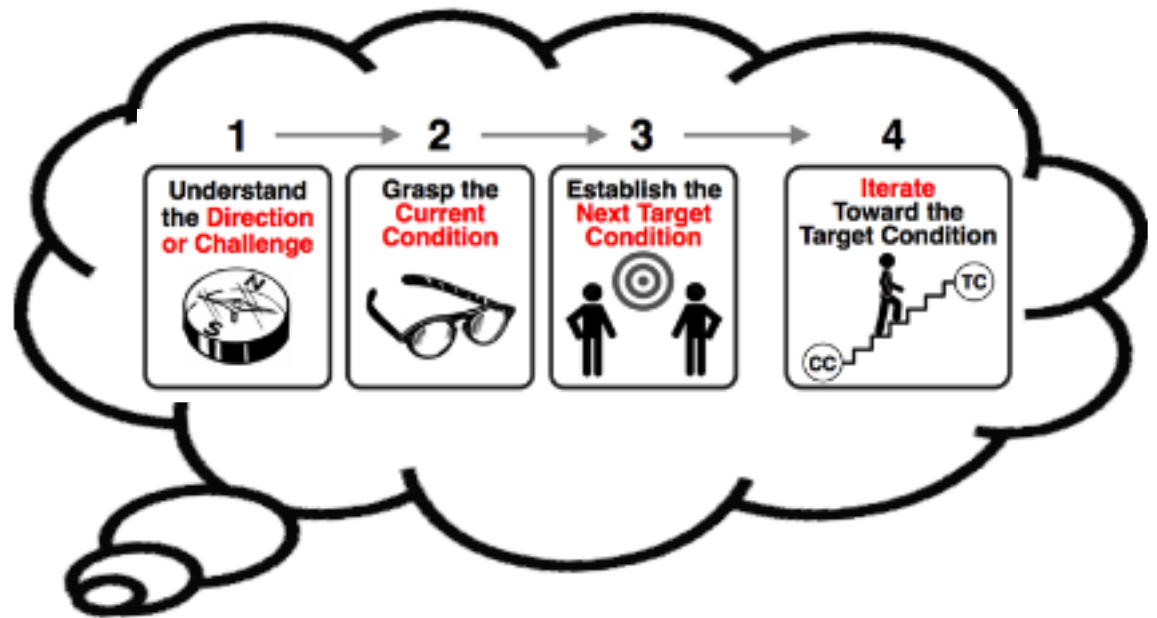


# *Introduction to the Improvement Kata*

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# MANAGING FOR IMPROVEMENT, ADAPTIVENESS AND SUPERIOR RESULTS

**Coaching and practicing the Improvement Kata pattern  
gives your team and your organization an advantage**



***“In times of change the learners will inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists”***

**~ Eric Hoffer**

**The scientific pattern of the Improvement Kata is a powerfully effective approach for meeting challenges in dynamic conditions that anyone can learn through practice.**

# WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT:

## -- Learning Scientific Skills --



The Improvement Kata & Coaching Kata combine a **scientific working pattern** with techniques of **deliberate practice**, to make scientific thinking a teachable meta-skill that anyone can learn.

These foundational thinking habits are the basis for:

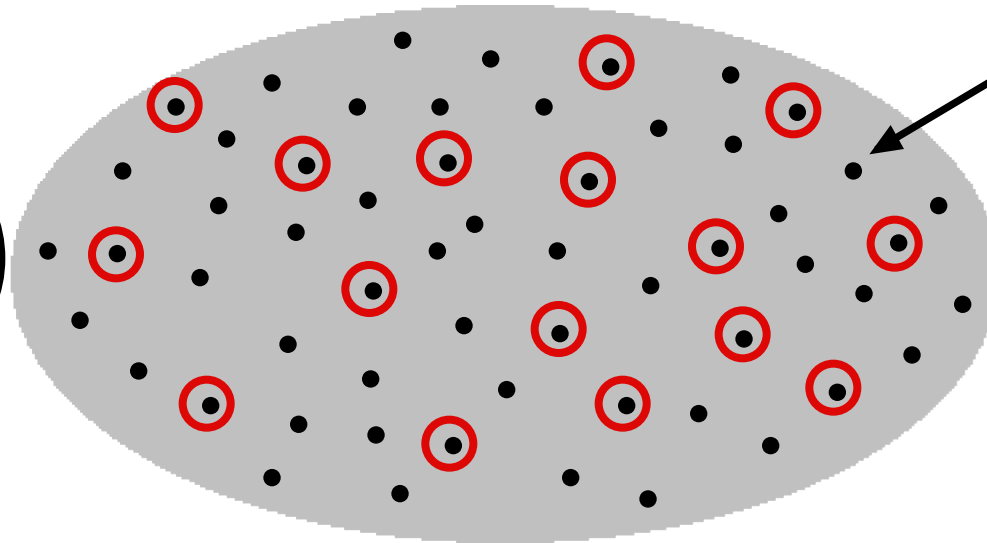
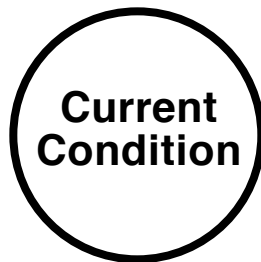
- Learning how to successfully pursue seemingly unattainable goals in complex systems.
- Enabling teams who are nearer to a situation to make their own decisions & maneuver effectively.





# HOW DO WE TEND TO TRY TO IMPROVE?

**We hunt for wastes or react to problems, and try to eliminate them**



*Problems, wastes and opportunities for improvement*



**This scattershot approach may not achieve meaningful improvement that moves the organization forward.**

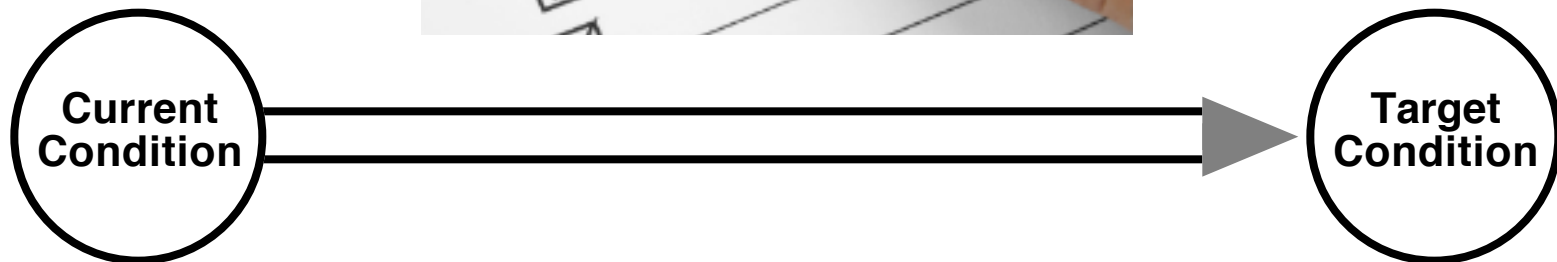
**It misspends our limited capacity for making improvements.**

**We don't learn much, because we're not experimenting.**



## HOW DO WE TEND TO TRY TO REACH AN OBJECTIVE?

We deliberate, try to make the best plan, and then implement it



We think we know how we will get there, but both your knowledge and the situation change as you move forward!

With this approach we're not doing enough experimenting, learning and adapting.



# THE IMPROVEMENT KATA IS A DIFFERENT APPROACH

With the Improvement Kata you work iteratively toward a defined target condition, on the way to a challenge, learning along the way. You work on those things that you discover you *need* to work on to reach the next target condition.

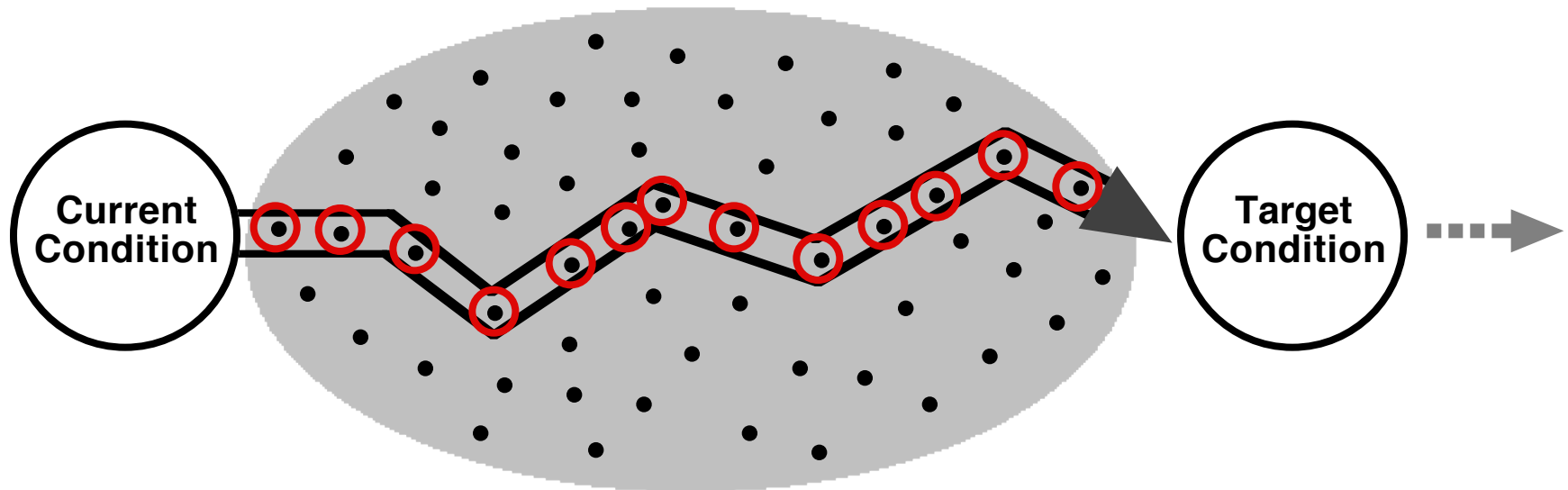
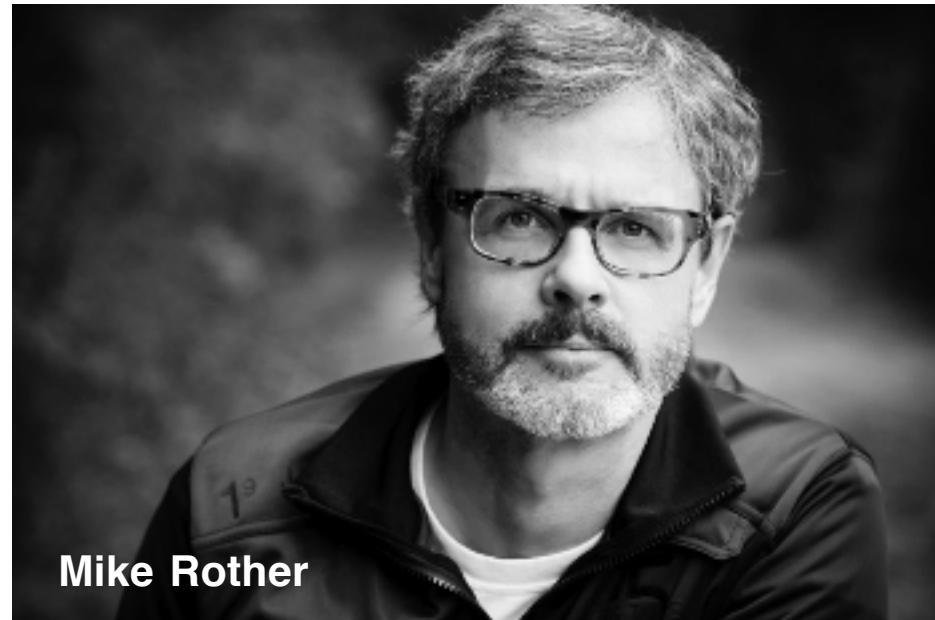


Diagram by Mr. Jeff Uitenbroek



**Thriving in uncertain and competitive circumstances involves *striving* for something, not just waiting, reacting to problems that arise and trying to counteract entropy.**

**However, just communicating a vision and challenge to strive for may not be enough. It takes more than a goal and some positive attitude for an organization to succeed.**

**It helps to have a **systematic** and **scientific** way of achieving goals and meeting challenges that can be **taught** to everyone in the organization.**

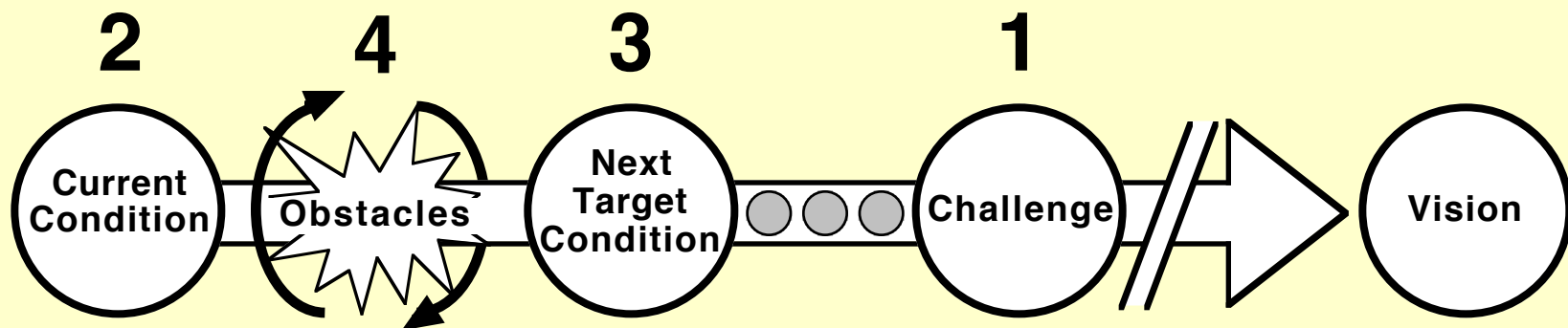
**That's what the Improvement Kata & Coaching Kata are about!**



# THE IMPROVEMENT KATA PATTERN

The **Improvement Kata** is a 4-step pattern that includes practice routines in order to make striving and scientific working a daily habit

- 1 In consideration of the overarching direction or challenge...
- 2 Grasp the current condition.
- 3 Define the next target condition.
- 4 Move toward that target condition iteratively via experiments, which uncovers the obstacles that *need* to be worked on.

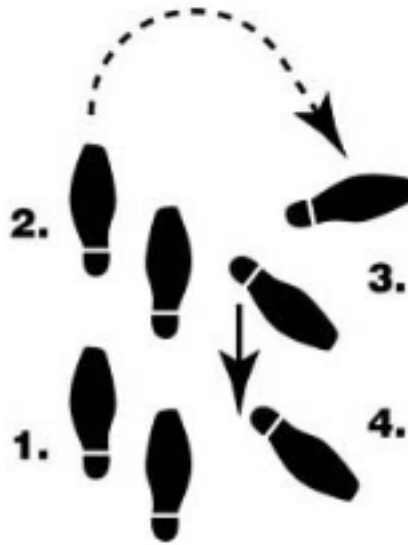


***The Improvement Kata pattern is a way of achieving things that you don't know how you are going to achieve***



# WHAT ARE KATA? THEY'RE PRACTICE ROUTINES!

**It's how you start. A kata is a structured routine you practice deliberately as a beginner\*, so its pattern becomes a new habit.**



Through practicing, the pattern of a kata becomes second nature; done with little conscious attention. The goal is not the kata itself, which gets used less and less as you become more and more proficient, but the habits of thinking & acting that practicing the kata leaves behind.

An example is practicing to learn to drive a car. Once you can drive you don't think much anymore about how to use the car's controls and instead can focus your attention on the situational aspects of navigating the road.

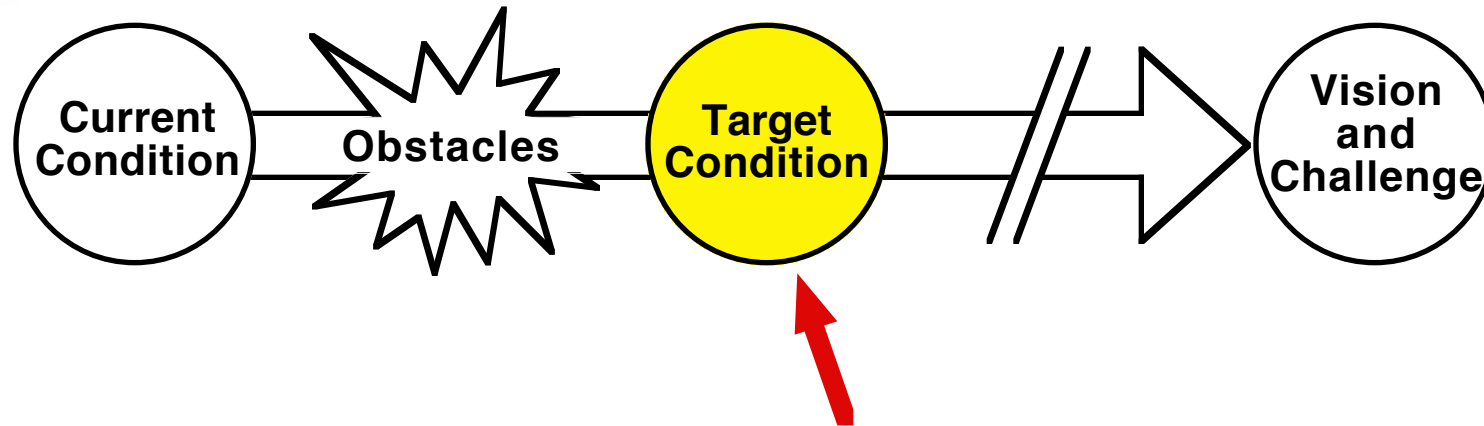


**\*Whenever you start learning a new skill you're a beginner**

**Why does a kata matter? It's a way of transferring skills and developing mindset. Kata help translate concepts into practical reality.**



## THE IMPROVEMENT KATA IS FOCUSED



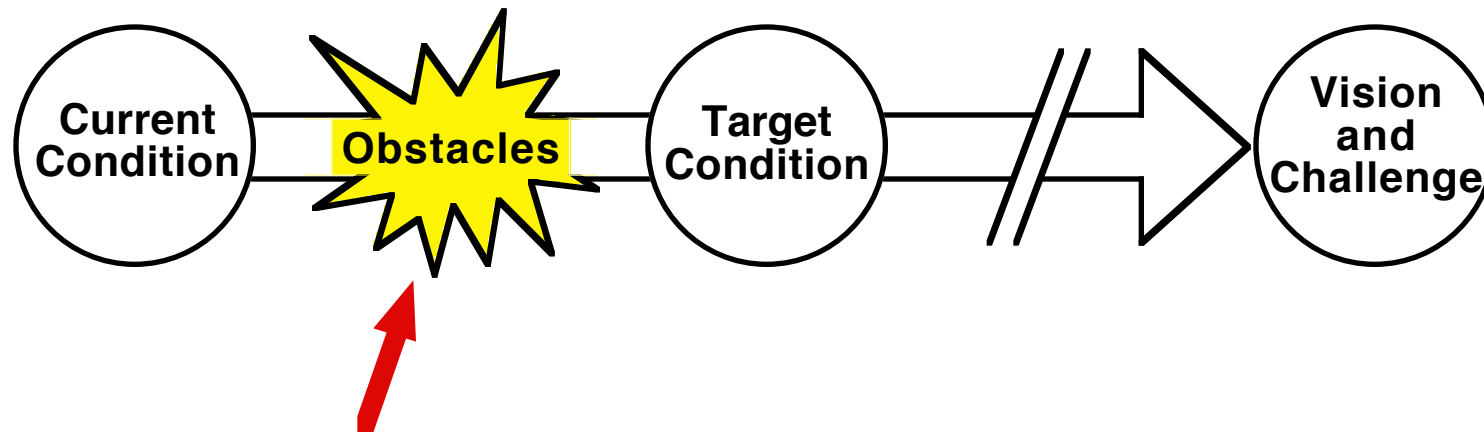
The target condition focuses people's attention and provides guidance.

Setting a target condition is not about choosing between existing options or best practices. It's about aspiring to new performance.

By setting a target condition and trying to achieve it, you learn why you cannot. That's what you work on.



# THE IMPROVEMENT KATA IS ITERATIVE



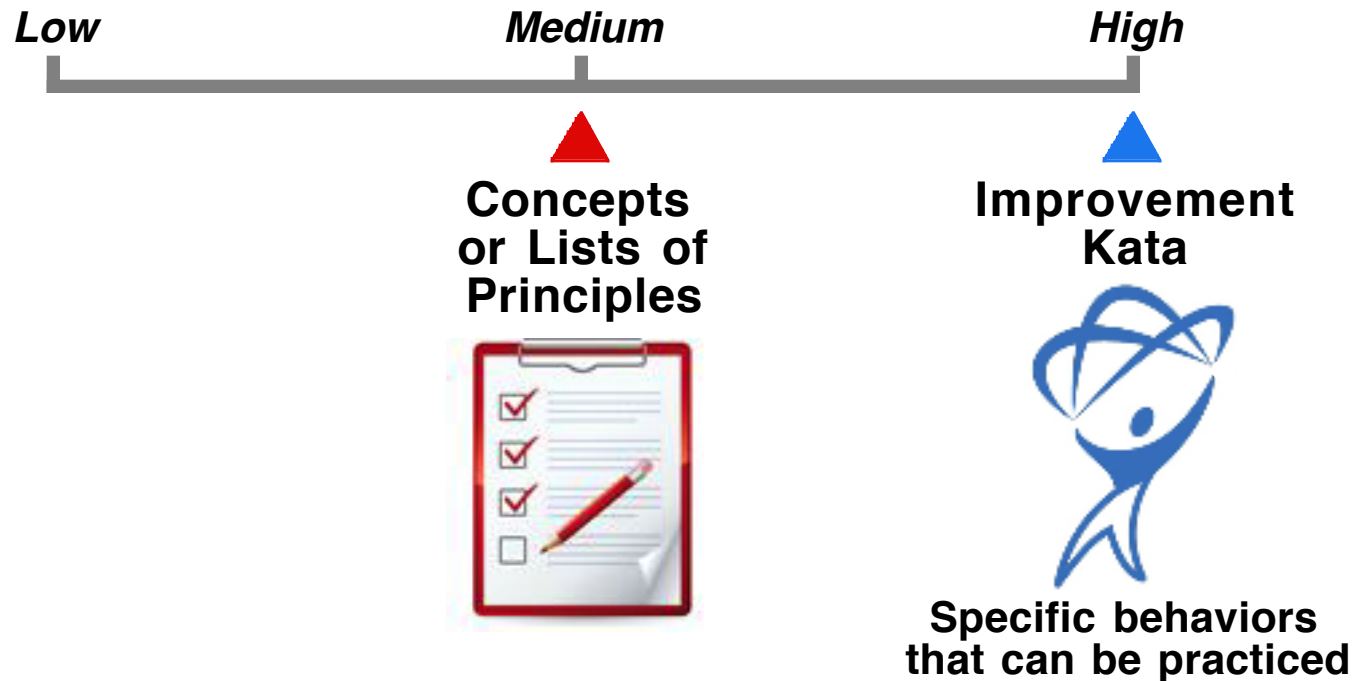
**Rather than needing to wholly predict the path, the Improvement Kata spurs discovery and adaptation along the way.**

**Teams using the Improvement Kata learn as they strive to reach an objective, and adapt based on what they are learning.**

# THE IMPROVEMENT KATA IS OPERATIONALIZABLE

Because it includes practice routines, the Improvement Kata is a teachable, transferrable behavior pattern. This operationalizability is important, because new habits come from physical experiences.

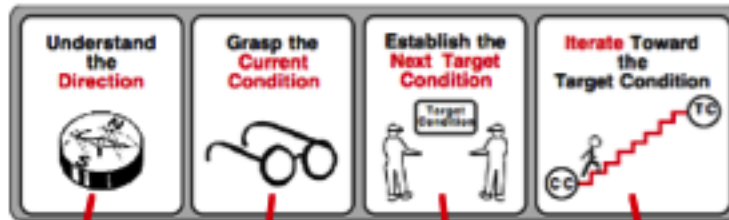
## *Range of Operationalizability*



With repetition and positive experiences you can make the pattern of the Improvement Kata part of your everyday approach to goals and challenges

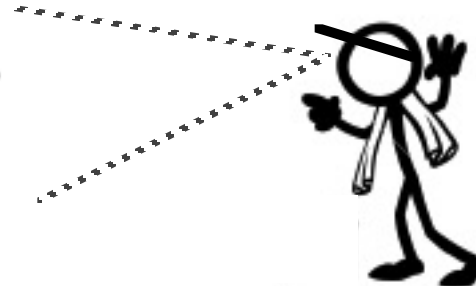
# THE IMPROVEMENT KATA HAS PRACTICE ROUTINES

## The IMPROVEMENT KATA PATTERN (the scientific approach)



These are **PRACTICE ROUTINES**  
to acquire / develop the  
scientific pattern of  
thinking and acting

*This is the overall pattern of  
thinking and acting we want to  
achieve. It's a universal meta  
skill that can be applied in all  
walks of life*



This is the **COACHING KATA**,  
a practice routine for learning  
how to teach the  
Improvement Kata pattern

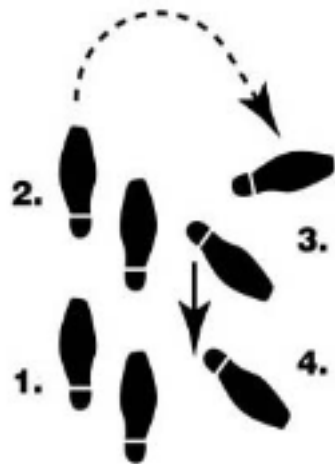
**“Pattern”**  
(a dance)



**“Practice Routine”**  
(dance steps)

The Improvement Kata is about developing new skills and habits -- just as athletes and musicians do -- that make you and your team more effective at achieving goals and meeting challenges.

There is one overall **pattern (the dance, or skill, you’re trying to learn and teach)**, called the “Improvement Kata.” It’s a systematic, scientific way of thinking and acting that can be applied to any goal. The objective is to have everyone in your organization be able to dance this pattern smoothly and confidently, in your organization’s own style.

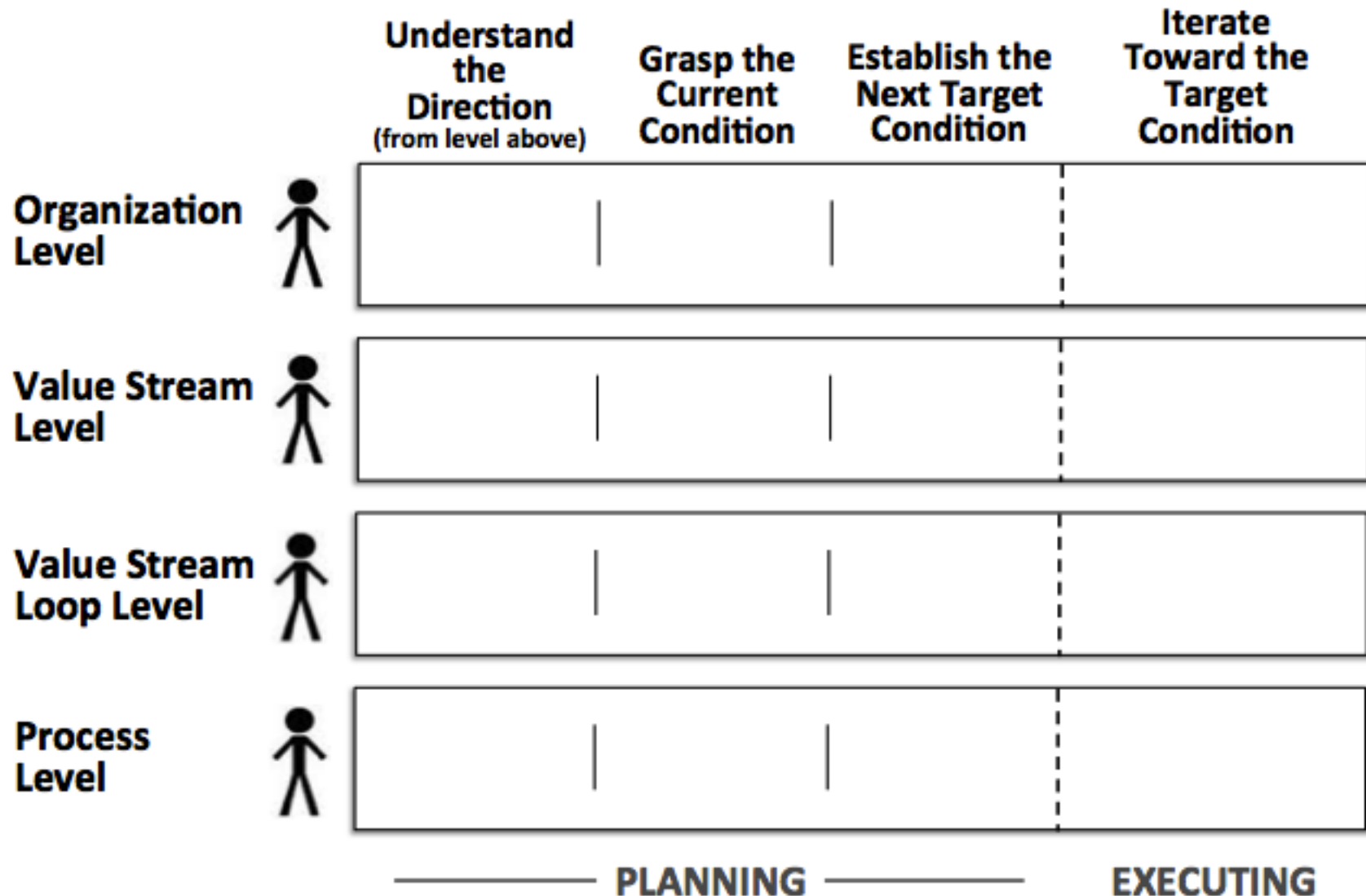


However, just knowing the pattern of the dance is not enough for learning how to dance. That’s why there are structured **practice routines (the dance steps)** for beginners to start with so they can learn the Improvement Kata pattern.

There is also a practice routine for *teaching* the Improvement Kata pattern. It’s called the **“Coaching Kata.”**

# THE IK PATTERN IS USED AT ALL LEVELS

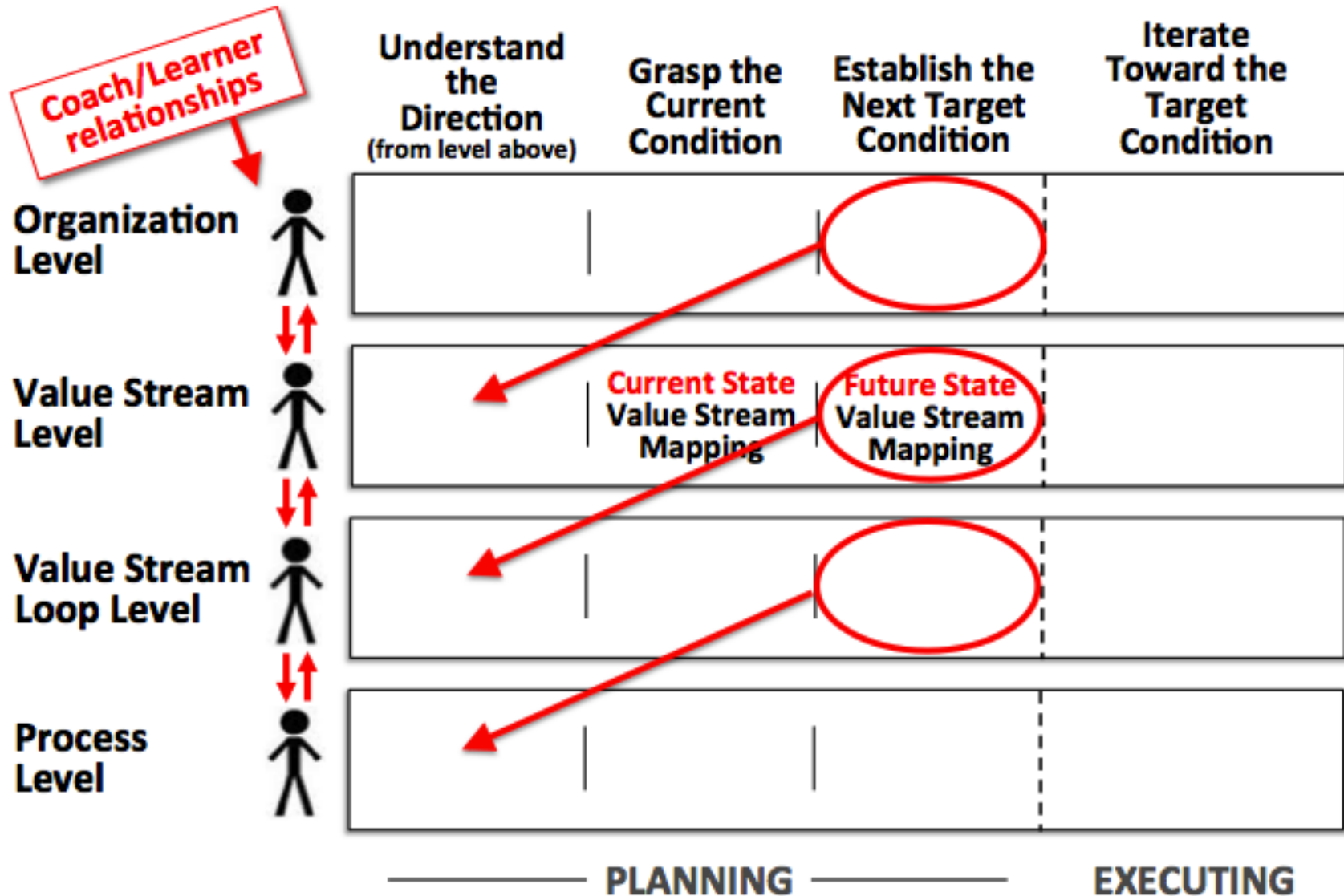
The content is different, but the pattern of thinking is the same





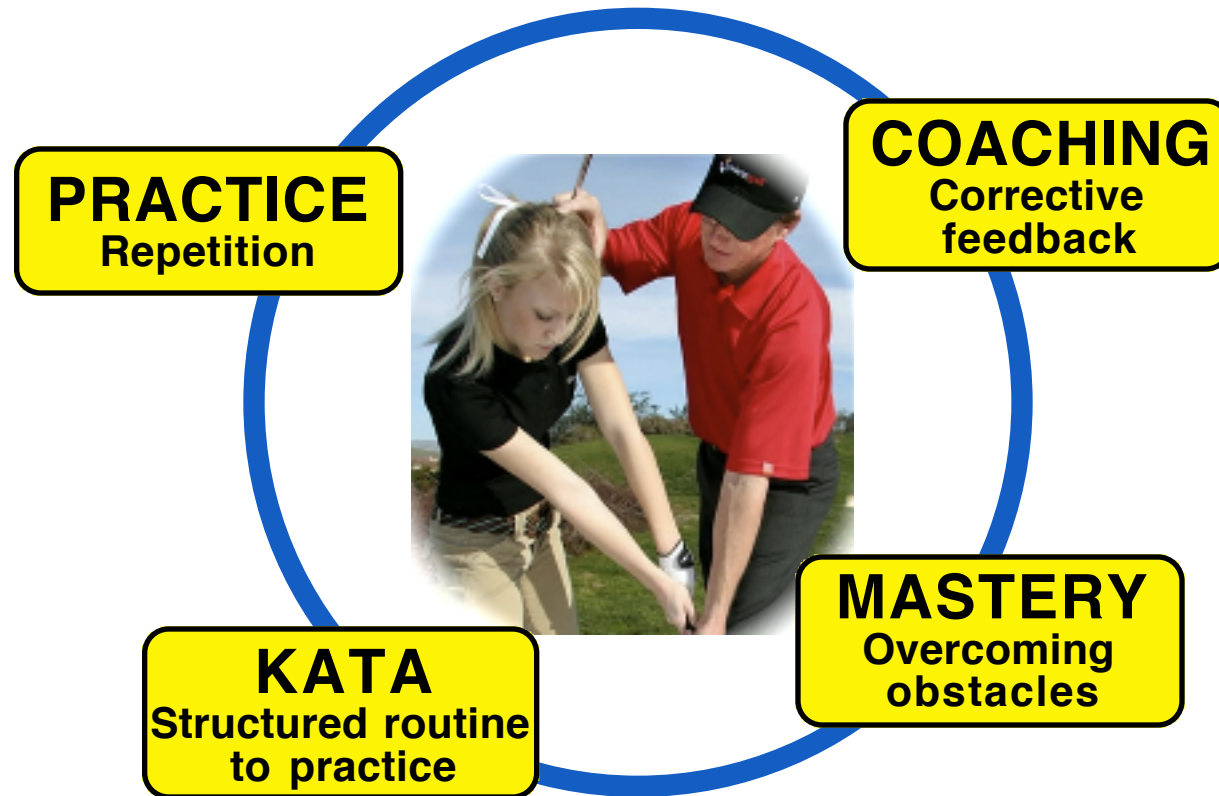
# THE IK PATTERN CONNECTS THE LEVELS

*A Target Condition at one level is the Direction for the next level*



# HOW DO YOU LEARN THE IMPROVEMENT KATA?

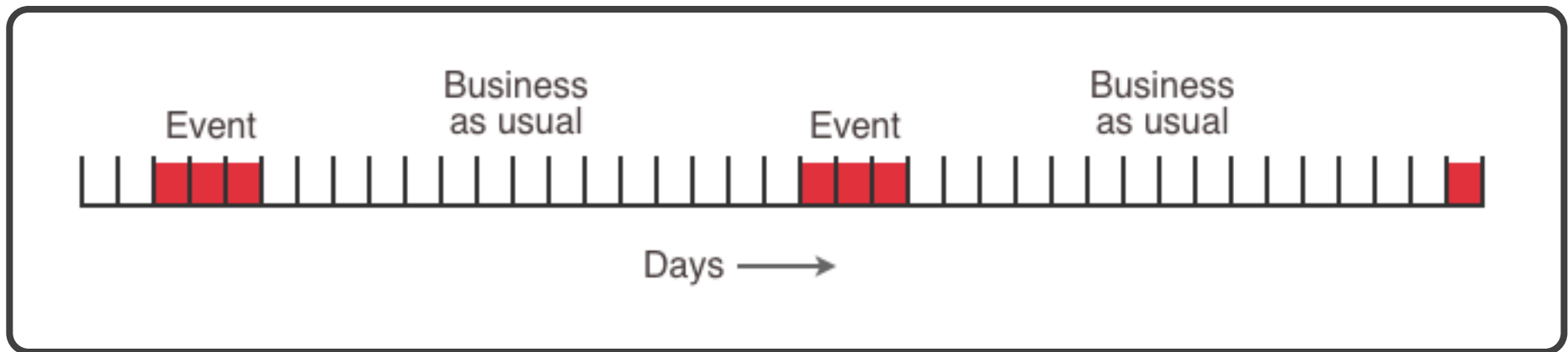
It is well known that it takes the following ingredients  
to develop new skills, habits and mindset



# HOW FREQUENT SHOULD THE PRACTICING BE?

**The practice needs to become part of every day's work**

**If you only periodically conduct a training event or periodically work on an improvement but the rest of the time it's business as usual, then what you are actually teaching is *business as usual*.**



**To achieve continuous improvement the associated activity should be embedded in daily work throughout the organization, coached by middle managers *not* Lean staff or external consultants. (Lean staff can coach the managers.)**

# ASK THE FIVE COACHING KATA QUESTIONS EVERY DAY

Card is available on the Toyota Kata Website

## COACHING KATA

### The Five Questions

- 1) What is the **Target Condition**?
- 2) What is the **Actual Condition** now?  
-----*(Turn Card Over)*----->
- 3) What **Obstacles** do you think are preventing you from reaching the target condition?  
Which *\*one\** are you addressing now?
- 4) What is your **Next Step**?  
(Next experiment) What do you expect?
- 5) When can we go and see what we **Have Learned** from taking that step?

*\*You'll often work on the same obstacle for several PDCA cycles*

### Back of card - Reflection Section

#### Reflect on the Last Step Taken

Because you don't actually know what the result of a step will be!

- 1) What did you plan as your **Last Step**?
- 2) What did you **Expect**?
- 3) What **Actually Happened**?
- 4) What did you **Learn**?

Card is turned over to reflect on the last step

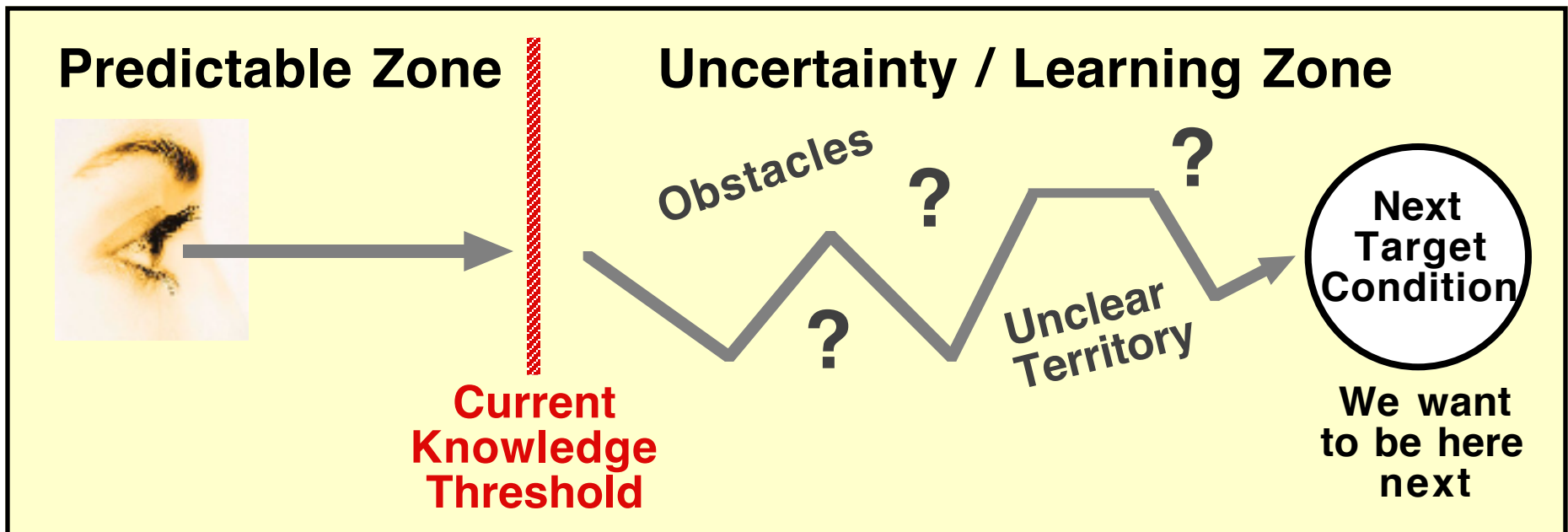


----->  
*Return to question 3*

# IMPROVING, ADAPTING AND INNOVATING

How will you achieve your objective?

The way forward is iterative & experimenting, aimed at a desired condition that we **don't yet know** how we will achieve



# COMFORT COMES WITH PRACTICE

The trick is to develop strong mental circuits not for solutions, but for a *means* by which we navigate uncertain conditions and develop solutions.

*---> Make a habit out of a kata for dealing with uncertainty*

This is like training in sports: To prepare for contests with unpredictable paths the focus of the training is not solutions, but how to play.



*We can work  
iteratively,  
adjust and  
adapt...*

*...if we have  
practiced and  
learned a way  
of doing that.*



# A CHAIN REACTION

Add to the **adaptive toolkit** of the people in your organization  
by practicing the Improvement Kata

***Increased  
Skill***



***Self  
Efficacy***



***Openness to  
Challenges***

When teams practice the **Improvement Kata** they become more skillful and competent at meeting challenges...

... because they learn to work iteratively and scientifically.

As a result, they grow more comfortable with unpredictable paths



Which allows them to be more open to new challenges!

**Self-Efficacy: The belief that you can master a situation**

**Self-Efficacy is learned!**





# EPILOGUE

## What's different here?

With the Improvement Kata we have a model and practice routines that bridge the gap between concepts like *Systems Thinking* or *Learning Organization* and the day-to-day running of an organization. We finally have a way to operationalize such concepts.

There is tremendous brainpower in every organization and we can do a better job of utilizing it to meet challenges. But the hollow 'empowerment' concepts of the late 20th century didn't work, and brain science is telling us why... We naturally stick with our existing ways of doing things unless we consciously practice and learn a different problem-solving behavior. Just issuing challenges is not enough.

Challenge is part of the recipe, but the other, missing piece is that managers should teach their people - through coached practice in everyday work - a systematic and scientific way of meeting goals and challenges.

**The Improvement Kata is exactly that.**